

**Communique**  
**Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (IMG EFRA)**  
**2 November 2020**

The Inter Ministerial Group for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs met on Monday 2 November by video conference. The meeting was chaired by Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for the Natural Environment and Rural Affairs

The attending ministers were:

From the UK Government: George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Defra, Victoria Prentis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defra, David TC Davies MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales; David Duguid MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Scotland; and Robin Walker MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland.

From the Scottish Government: Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Tourism; and Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for the Natural Environment and Rural Affairs.

From the Northern Ireland Executive: Edwin Poots, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

From the Welsh Government: Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.

The chair welcomed Ministers to the meeting.

The meeting began with a discussion of the UK Government's proposals for replacement EU funding. Devolved ministers repeated their ongoing disappointment regarding the continued absence of HM Treasury representation at these meetings. The devolved administrations strongly criticised the UK Government's proposed funding package, highlighting that it fell well short of expectations and the repeated UK Government commitments to match 2019 levels of funding. Defra assured the group that HM Treasury was taking a consistent approach across the UK, that its funding commitments as set out in the manifesto would be met and agreed to pass on concerns to HM Treasury.

The group then discussed food security and the need to accelerate joint working, information sharing, and contingency planning ahead of the end of the Transition Period, including the need to carry out a number of joint exercises to test readiness. Devolved ministers repeated calls for the UK Government to pick up any additional costs linked to Brexit. UK Government confirmed that they had already taken steps to mitigate food security risks, including across the short straits and believed that non-tariff barriers would have a minimal impact on consumer food prices. Defra then confirmed it was awaiting a response from the EU with regards to securing third country status and would update the group as soon as possible.

The Northern Ireland Minister provided an update on key milestones for the delivery of Points of Entry highlighting the challenges for delivery of documentary and identity checks for SPS goods entering Northern Ireland, the substantive plans for facilities necessary and contingency plans, and stressed concerns that some businesses could cease trading with Northern Ireland because of the impact of the NI Protocol. Ministers agreed that matters relating to border preparedness, future funding and business readiness were priority issues moving forward.

The group then discussed Transition Arrangements, agreeing to increase joint working and communication in the lead up to the end of the year in all aspects of stakeholder relations. Ministers noted frustrations expressed by industry and the developments being undertaken by UK Government.

Finally, Scottish and Northern Ireland Ministers requested an update on third country equivalence for seed potatoes. Defra assured them this was with the European Commission and that they are awaiting a response.